

Book reviews

Penicillin in the Treatment of Syphilis. The Experience of Three Decades. By O. IDSØE, T. GUTHE, and R. R. WILLCOX. 1972. Pp. 68. Supplement to the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* (1972), vol. 47 (£1.20).

Thirty years have now passed since Mahoney and his colleagues first reported on the use of penicillin in the treatment of early syphilis. The authors, with the collaboration of a distinguished team of investigators, have written a monograph which takes stock of the long-term results of treatment. The chemistry of penicillin, its mode of action, the principles and aims of treatment, and suitable schedules of treatment are discussed at length. Adverse reactions to penicillin and their immunological basis are dealt with in detail. Other antibiotics, which can be used when penicillin is contraindicated, are described and their side-effects discussed. An analysis of reports from the literature on 1,435 patients treated by these alternative methods is presented.

The results of treatment with penicillin of 5,640 patients with early syphilis and of 8,819 patients with late latent or late symptomatic syphilis are tabulated. These are taken from reports selected from the literature which satisfied the authors' criteria of completeness, comparability, and adequate duration of observation after treatment. These results fully justify the faith which we have come to place in penicillin.

The authors are to be congratulated on having produced a very useful and informative digest of the treatment of syphilis which is not readily available elsewhere. Venereologists will find it a helpful guide to the literature; the size of this can be judged from the bibliography, which contains some 630 references to the world literature. This inexpensive monograph should certainly be available in all departmental libraries. *A. E. Wilkinson*

Venereal Diseases—Treatment and Nursing. By HAZEL ELLIOTT and KURT RYZ. 1972. Pp. 115, 16 figs, 1 col. pl. Patient Care Series, Baillière Tindall, London (£1.80).

A book written by nurses, which will enlighten our general nursing colleagues on the subject of venereology, is long overdue. This is such a book and will certainly be of value to the profession as a whole.

The introductory chapter, aptly named 'A Challenge', clearly outlines the reasons for the increase in the sexually transmitted diseases.

This is followed by 'Social and Psychological Problems', with sections on unmarried mothers, teenagers, homosexuals, venereophobia, and legal questions. This chapter also stresses the importance of contact tracing and describes the methods used.

There follows a brief but adequate chapter on the male and female reproductive systems which includes some very good diagrams.

The next four chapters are devoted to the diseases seen in the clinics. Signs, symptoms, and treatments are well described, each section ending with 'questions asked by patients'. This gives a guide to the stock enquiries made by patients, and forms a basis on which suitable answers may be prepared.

The section on gonorrhoea describes signs and symptoms of the uncomplicated disease for men and women, but the complications are dealt with collectively. This may prove confusing to junior nurses. It is remarked that 40 per cent. of women suffering from gonorrhoea are asymptomatic (page 45); this may be true, but it should have been stressed that only 20 per cent. attend because of symptoms.

Although the standards of accuracy on the whole are good, there are a few errors, and some statements need clarifying. On page 25 it is stated that yaws, bejel, and pinta are usually sexually transmitted. The next paragraph, under the heading incidence of syphilis, states that the incidence of syphilis has risen again since 1959 and has remained consistently high. I should have thought it worth mentioning that the incidence of the disease in the United Kingdom is *not* high, and that it seems to be well controlled. The opening paragraph in the chapter on trichomoniasis states that men are symptom free, yet on the next page the occurrence of urethral discharge is mentioned. On pages 58 and 59 the differences between non-gonococcal and non-specific urethritis are not defined. On page 90 it is stated that haematuria will probably occur after the dilatation of strictures; one would hope that this is the exception rather than the rule.

An important chapter on 'Trolleys, Trays, and Procedures' emphasizes the supportive role of nurses in the matter of patient comfort, such as warming the speculum, good positioning, explanation, and reassurance.

The book concludes with a chapter on 'Laboratory Techniques', which contains a simple explanation of the use of the microscope, descriptions of culture media and diagnostic tests, and a helpful colour plate on Gram-staining.

In general the presentation is very clear, but Figures 8 and 9 could well be replaced by better examples in future editions. The book can be particularly recommended to student nurses and nurses starting work in a V.D. clinic.

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Dermatology and Venereology (Dermatologie und Venereologie). By A. GREITHER. 1972. Pp. 212, 82 figs. Heidelberger Taschenbucher, Basistext Medizin, Vol. 113. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, and New York (DM 14.80).

This volume is one of the series of German 'pocket-books' within the framework of basic medicine and, as one would expect from such distinguished publishers, it is excellently produced in format and print. The author has found as a teacher that what the student in this field needs is not a pictorial atlas with captions but rather a basic text characterizing the morphological elements which make up the different skin diseases. This is done well and is amplified by simple line drawings. Individual dermatoses are briefly described with a variable amount of information on differential diagnosis and treatment. Sometimes the conditions entering into the differential diagnosis are briefly typified; elsewhere there is only a string of names which is less helpful. Treatment is occasionally idiosyncratically dealt with; thus in herpes zoster, whilst rightly warning against the use of corticosteroids, the author recommends only analgesics and vitamin B₁₂ without mentioning the use of virostatic

agents or the dreaded post-zoster neuritis and its potential prevention. Or again, condyloma acuminatum is described but not its treatment. Not all the common skin diseases find a space; thus pityriasis rosea is missing. The dermatological section is nevertheless a useful, concise account for the student and non-specialist and is especially strong on morphological aspects, a subject which has a strong tradition in the German literature.

Undoubtedly the weakest part is the section on venereology—a mere 14 pages—which deals with syphilis and briefly with gonorrhoea and the exotic trisome chancroid, LGV, and granuloma inguinale. NSU, which must surely be as common in Germany as elsewhere, Reiter's disease, and balanitis (except the rare balanitis xerotica obliterans), and most of the specific and non-specific types of *ulceration* are either not mentioned or dismissed in a line or two in the dermatological section. This underlines the fact that it is still the practice on the Continent of Europe to deal with sexually transmitted conditions as a minor side-line of dermatology, and the student or general practitioner reading this book will be left quite unprepared to deal with the bulk of these diseases. The sooner this approach is abandoned and it is recognized that the link between dermatology and venereology is now mainly a historical one, the better will it be for the very large number of patients with venereal diseases. It is possible that this change will come about because of the sheer weight in numbers of these seeking advice for sexually transmitted diseases, and because of the increasing scope, sophistication, and extent of the specialty of venereology as we know it in the United Kingdom.

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